MR. PRATT

By Joseph C. Lincoln.

Continued

CHAPTER XIII.
The Lawn Fete.

It was August now. The nice weather held out right along and one day on Ozone island was a good deal like the next.

And yet it seemed to me that there was little changes. For instance, take the matter of reading When we first arrived 'twas nothing but that Natural Life book; the Heavenly Twins was at it continuous, and such a thing as a newspaper or magazine was what Van Brunt called an "abomination." I couldn't get a paper even to kindle fire with; had to use poverty grass for that. But now the Natural Life sermon laid on the dining room mantel piece most of the time, with a layer of dust on it, and Scudder fetched the Boston and New York newspapers every day. And magazines and books begun to come in the mail.

I remember one day Hartley set reading the New York Evening Post, that part of it he called the "financial page." All at once he spoke.

"By Jove! Van," he says. "Consolidated Tea Lead is up three points from last week's quotations. There must be something doing."

Van looked at him, kind of sad and disappointed.

"Martin," says he, "are you falling from grace? Get thee behind me, Satan. Give me that financial sheet."

Hartley laughed and tossed it over.

"There!" says his chum, crumpling it up and shoving it into his pocket. "That disturbing influence is out of the way. Let us discuss the simple and satisfying subject of agriculture. There is an article on 'The Home Garden' in this month's number of The Rural Gentleman, which should be instructive to our friend Mr. Pratt, plower of sea and soil. Skipper, lend me your ears. I'll return them shortly."

Then he commenced to read that magazine piece out loud to me, very solemn, and stopping every once in a while to chuck in some ridiculous advice on his own account. This had got to be a regular thing. Every bit of farm news I had to hear. The garden was Van's pet joke.

"What," says he, when the reading was done, "is the latest crop bulletin, Sol?"

"I have the honor to report," says I, "that from the present outlook we'll have two cornstalks, one tomatter vine and three cucumber plants really in sight by to-morrow morning. That is, if the sand don't blow in and cover 'em up in the night."

"Good!" he says. "I move that the report be accepted. Martin, don't let me see you wasting your time on the frivolity of the street when there are such serious matters to claim our attention."

Which was all right, only that very afternoon I saw him, himself, out behind the barn, reading that Post financial page and looking mighty interested.

They were more anxious to be doing things than when they first come. Hartley's health was improving all the time, and that probably accounted for his liveliness. I took 'em sailing 'most every day and they wanted to fish and shoot and the like of that.

Once we went on a cruise after shore birds. I bagged a few, but the Twins couldn't hit a flock of balloons with a cannon, so they didn't have no luck. But a little later Van went out alone with Nate Scudder and I'll be blessed if he didn't come back with a dozen peep and ring-necks. Then the way he crowed over me and Martin was scandalous, till, a week later, Hartley himself went gunning with Nate and fetched home 15, bigger and better than his chum's. And after this, of course, 'twas nothing but what a great hunter Scudder was, and rubbing it into me.

The hotel boarders and the town folks was mighty interested in the Ozone islanders by this time. The picnic boats from the Old Comfort house generally sailed close to our point to give the passengers a chance to look our outfit over. Sometimes the boats stopped, and then the Twins would take an observation from an upstairs window, and, if they liked the looks of the crowd, would come down and keep what they called "open house." "Open house" always meant more work for Eureka and me. Lucky for us, 'twas pretty seldom that the Heavenlies liked their callers' looks well enough to open up.

The Baptist minister and his wife came over to call. There was going to be a "lawn fete and sale" at the church pretty soon, and the idea was to get the Twins to "donate" something. Van Brunt was full of his high jinks that day, and he took that poor parson and his wife in tow.

First he carted 'em out to the henyard. He paraded up and down in front of the coops, pointing out the scraggly Plymouth Rocks as if they was some kind of freaks, like ostriches. He said they ate a bag of corn a day and laid one egg a week, so he figgered that every egg was worth five dollars or so. What did the parson think of a donation of half a dozen of them eggs?

"Not to eat, you understand," says Van; "but as rarities, as curiosities."

The minister was a young feller, not long out of college, and pretty straightlaced. But he had some fun in him.

"If I might suggest," he says, "I think one of the hens themselves would be more acceptable and profitable. Among our summer people there is a great demand for 'antiques.' Now one of those hens—"

That tickled Van. He told Hartley afterwards that the minister was a trump. He donated liberal—not with eggs nor poultry neither—and promised that he and Hartley would attend the sale.

And they did. And so did Eureka and me. The lawn fete was held in the meeting house front yard, and 'twas all rigged up fine with flags and tissue paper and bunting. There was a a grab bag and a cake table and a fancy goods table, and I don't know what all. All the summer folks was there, and most of the town women and girls, and the prices charged for things would have been highway robbery if it hadn't been a church that was charging 'em.

The Heavenlies bought and bought and bought. They bought everything—the foolishest things. Van bought three pair of embroidered suspenders and a crocheted tidy and a pin cushion, and Martin got a worsted afghan and a hand-painted soft pillow, so fresh that the paint come off on your hands when you touched it. And 'twa'n't any quiet colored paint neither. And when you rubbed off one layer there was another underneath. Luretta Daniels' daughter had painted it; she was taking lessons and her ma said that she'd painted that pillow over much as a dozen times, because the colors wa'n't "blending right" or the subject didn't suit her. 'Twas so stiff with paint on top that 'twould have been like ramming your head into fence to lay on it.

We stayed till most everything was sold but a log cabin bed quilt that the Christian paupers at the poorhouse had made. Nobody seemed to want that, although they was gay rags enough in it to build a rainbow. The minister's wife said she was so sorry. The poor things at the almshouse had worked so hard.

"You wait a minute," says Van. "I'll get rid of it."

He took out his vest pocket memorandum book and tore about ten pages into little squares. Then he made numbers on these squares with a pencil. Half of these he put into his hat, and, the next I knew, he was standing on a chair, waving the bedquilt with one hand and the hat with t'other.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he shouts. "Here is positively the last chance to secure this magnificent—er—er—lambrykin, made by the deserving poor to cover the restless rich. Competition has been so strong that no one person has been able to buy it. The only solution would be a syndicate, and the almshouse is opposed to trusts. Therefore I am authorized to"—then he bent down and whispered: "Mr. Morton, kindly give me whatever small change you have left."

The minister looked puzzled, but he handed up a half dollar. Van Brunt reaches into the hat and takes out one of the folded slips of paper.

"Here you are sir," says he. "Treasure that as you would your life. Now, then, ladies and gentlemen, this is a raffle. The minister starts it. Tickets are anything you please, provided it's enough. Come early and avoid the rush."

There was a kind of gasp from all the church people. The members of the sewing circle looked at each other with the most horrified kind of faces. The parson, Mr. Morton, run forward.

"Just a minute, Mr. Van Brunt, if you please," he sings out.

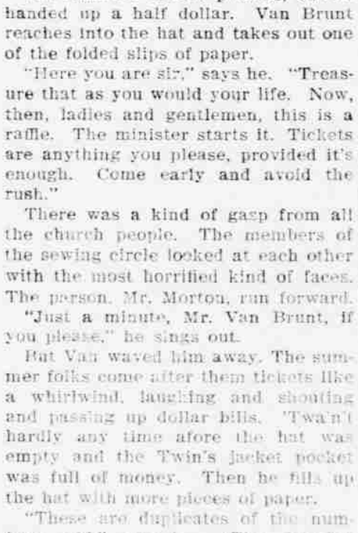
But Van waved him away. The summer folks come after them tickets like a whirlwind, laughing and shouting and passing up dollar bills. 'Twa'n't hardly any time afore the hat was empty and the Twin's jacket pocket was full of money. Then he fills up the hat with more pieces of paper.

"These are duplicates of the numbers sold," says he. "The drawing will now take place. Here, Bill!"

He grabs a little shaver by the coat collar and lifts him up to the chair. Old lady Patterson, the deacon's wife, set up a scream.

"Stop!" she yells. "My child shall not—"

"It takes but a moment, madam," says Van, waving to her, calm and easy. "Now, Julius Caesar, please take one of those numbers from the hat."



"Here Is Positively the Last Chance to Secure This Magnificent—er—er—er—Lambrykin."

The boy reddened up and grinned and looked foolish, but he stuck a freckled paw in and took out a piece of paper.

"Number 14," shouts Van Brunt. "Number 14 secures the—the tapestry. Who's the lucky one?"

Everybody unfolded their papers, but there didn't seem to be any 14. Hartley had three, but he wa'n't in it.

"Number 14," Van calls. "Who is 14? Mr. Morton, you began this. Where is your ticket?"

The minister looked dreadfully troubled. "Really," he stammered, "I—I—it was a mistake. I—"

"Here's yours, Mr. Morton," says a little girl. "You dropped it on the ground."

The parson looked pretty sick. He reached for it, but Van got it first.

"Number 14 it is," he says. "Our esteemed friend, Rev. Mr. Morton, secures the prize. That's as it should be. Three cheers for Mr. Morton!"

The summer folks give the cheers, but the church folks looked pretty average wild, I thought.

I forgot how much was in Van Brunt's pocket. That bedquilt fetched in enough money to pretty nigh buy the poorhouse itself.

The Twins felt good. They figgered that they'd made a hit at that "lawn fete."

"Great success, my raffle idea, wasn't it, skipper," says Van Brunt, on the way home.

I didn't answer right off. Eureka spoke up.

"Well," she says, "it sold the bedquilt, but I wouldn't wonder if it made the new minister lose his job. You see, 'twas gambling, and that church is dreadful down on gambling. Mrs. Patterson told me that she should have her husband call a parish meeting right off. I guess you won't be invited to no more sales this year."

And we wa'n't. Poor Morton had an awful time explaining, and the only way he could get out of it was to lay it heavy on the Twins. He had to preach a sermon giving gambling fits, and all around town 'twas nothing but how dissipated and wicked the Heavenlies was. We wa'n't fit for decent folks to associate with.

But I ain't been able to learn, even yet, that the bedquilt money was returned to the ticket buyers.

Van got a long letter from Agnes Page a little later, saying that she had heard of him as a "disturbing influence" and that she was shocked and grieved. He thought 'twas a great joke and didn't seem to care much. Nate Scudder was glad of the whole business. He didn't want nobody else to be milking his own pet cows.

Me and Eureka was glad, too, in a way. We judged that Van's being in disgrace with his girl would help Hartley's side along. And in a few days another idea begun to develop that, when I found it out, seemed to me likely to help him more.

Eureka told me that she'd seen a dress pattern at the church sale that she wanted awful. I asked her why she didn't buy it and she said 'twas two dollars and a half and she couldn't afford it. Hartley heard her say it and he loafed out into the kitchen and begun to ask questions, pumping her, sort of quiet, to find out what she done with her money. After she'd gone home he says to me:

"Skipper, that girl is robbing herself to support that old loafer, her father."

"That's right," says I. "It's my opinion that she ain't never told him that she ain't getting that extry two dollars a week. I guess she pays every cent into the house."

"It's a shame!" says he. "Can't we make the old vagabond earn his own living?"

"When you do," I says, "I'll believe that black's the blonde shade of white. Making Washy Sparrow work would be as big a miracle as the loaves and fishes."

He thought a spell. "Well, I mean to look into the matter," he says. "Sol, I want you to find out who owns that apology for a house they live in. Don't ask Eureka. We must keep it a secret from her or she'll interfere. And we may as well not tell Van, either. He's so careless that he might give it away."

"All right," says I. "I'll ask Scudder. He knows 'most all of everybody's business and Huldy Ann knows the rest."

So when Nate come, after breakfast next morning, I asked him.

"What do you want to know for?" says he, suspicious as usual.

"Oh, nothing. Just curious, that's all."

"They ain't going to move out, are they?" He seemed mighty interested.

"No, no!" says I. "Where'd they move to? Think they're going to Washington to visit the president or the diplomatic corpse?"

"Well," he says, "you needn't get mad. I didn't know but they might be coming over here. I don't mind telling you. Huldy Ann, my wife, owns the place, if you want to know."

I was surprised. He was a regular sand-flea for bobbing up where you didn't expect to him.

"She does?" says I. "Say, Nate, for the land sakes how much more of this country belongs to you and Huldy? And how much did you pay for it?"

He went on with a long rigmarole about a morigage and a second mortgage and "foreclosing to protect himself," and so on. All I see in it was more proofs that lambs fooling with Nate Scudder was likely to lose, not only wool, but hoofs, hide and tallow.

When I told Hartley he seemed real pleased.

"That makes it easy," he says. "Scudder will accommodate me by doing a little favor, won't he?"

"Sure thing!" says I, sarcastic. "Ain't he been accommodating you ever since you struck town?"

"Yes," he says, "he has. Scudder is a generous chap."

And he meant it, too! Why the good Lord lets such simple innocents as him and his chum run around loose for it—but there! No doubt he has his reasons. And what would become of the summer hotels without that kind?

Him and Nate was pretty thick for the next few days. Something was up, though as yet I wa'n't in the secret. Hartley made one or two trips to the village and he took neither me nor Van with him. He asked me where the doctor lived and a lot more questions.

Van Brunt, too, was getting pretty confidential with Nate. I caught the two of 'em off alone by the barn or somewheres quite a good many times. They was always whispering earnest, and when I hove in sight they'd break away and act guilty. There was something up there, too, and again I wa'n't in with the elect. I begun to feel slighted.

But in a little while Hartley's secret come out. One day Van took a notion to go down to Half Moon Neck gunning after peeps. He wanted Hartley to go with him, but Martin said no. He said he didn't feel like it, somehow. Why didn't Van put it off?

But Van wa'n't the put-off kind. He was going and going right then. He wanted Scudder to sail him down, but Nate was too busy, so he hired Eureka's brother, Lycurgus. The two sailed away in the Dora Bassett to be gone all night. I wa'n't invited. The Twins had no use for me as gunning pilot.

That afternoon late Hartley comes over from the main, rowed by Scudder. The pair of 'em seemed mighty tickled about something.

"Well, Mr. Hartley," says Nate, "we'll see you to-morrow morning. It'll work all right; you see."

"Will he work?" laughs Hartley. "That's the question."

"I cal'late he'll make the bluff," snickers Scudder. "I don't know where he'll sleep nights if he don't. Land of love! Did you see his face when you sprung it on him? Haw! haw!"

When we got to the house Hartley calls in Eureka.

"You're going to stay here to-night," he says to her. "Mr. Pratt and I have an errand ashore early in the morning and Mr. Van Brunt will be back soon after, and hungry, I imagine. So you must be ready with his breakfast. It's all right. Your father understands."

Eureka was some surprised, but she said she'd stay.

All through supper Hartley was laughing to himself. Just afore bedtime he calls me out on the porch.

"Sol," he says, "what would surprise you most in this world?"

"To see Mr. Van Brunt shoot at a bird and hit it," says I. Leaving me out of all these gunning trips jarred my pride considerable.

"Humph!" he says. "He shot a dozen the other day."

"Yes, but I didn't see him shoot 'em."

He laughed. "You countrymen are jealous creatures," he says. "Well, this is more surprising than that. What would you say if Mr. Washington Sparrow consented to go to work?"

I looked at him. "I wouldn't say nothing," I says. "I'd send for a strait-jacket. What are you talking about?"

He turned around in his chair.

"You remember I told you I was going to try to make him?" he says. "Well, I think I've succeeded. Come with me to-morrow morning and see. I'm doing it for the sake of that plucky daughter of his, and it has required some engineering and diplomacy. But I think I win. Don't mention a word to Eureka, though."

I promised to keep mum. I tried to get him to tell me more, but he wouldn't. "Wait and see" was all I could get out of him.

I turned in a kind of trance, as you might say. Washy Sparrow work! Well, I'd have to see him doing it with my own eyes. I wouldn't believe even a tintype of the performance if 'twas took by Saint Peter.

CHAPTER XIV.
"The Best Laid Plans."

We left the island early next day. I rowed to the main and anchored the skiff. Then me and Hartley walked up to the Neck road. I didn't ask no questions. He could speak first or be still. I'd had my dose. Nobody can call me nosey.

He did speak first. "Well, skipper?" he says, finally.

"Well, Mr. Hartley," says I.

"Why don't you ask me what my scheme is? Aren't you curious?"

"Scheme?" says I. "Scheme? I ain't much of a schemer, myself. Nice weather we're having, ain't it?"

He laughed. "Sol," says he, "I like you. You're the right sort—you and Scudder."

Drat him! Why did he want to spoil it all by that last?

"Virtue must be its own reward, then, far's I'm concerned," I says, pretty average dry. "I don't seem to be getting no other kind. Pity me and Nate couldn't divide the substantials more equal."

His face clouded right up. "Money!" he says, disgusted, kicking a stick out of his way. "Don't you for one minute believe that money means happiness."

"All right," I says. "I ain't contradicting you. You've had more experience with it than I have. Sometimes it seems as if I could manage to bear up under a couple of thousand or so without shedding more'n a bucket of tears; but I'm open to conviction—like the feller that said he stole the horse, but they'd got to show proof enough to satisfy him."

'Twas some minutes afore he come out of his blue fit. Then he says:

"The scheme is this: I determined to see what could be done to make things easier for the Sparrow girl. The only solution seemed to be the getting rid of papa."

"If you'd waited long enough," I says, "maybe his consumptive dyspepsy would have saved you the trouble."

"I wish I had your faith," says he.

"You have. The same kind. Washy's is different. His doctrine is faith without work. Go on."

"So I tried to think of some way to bring it about. When you told me that Scudder owned the Sparrow place I saw my chance. Scudder and I consulted. He was willing to lose his tenants provided he didn't lose the rent. The rent was nothing; I promised to make that good until our season here was over and Eureka could return home. But I made it clear that when she did return home her father mustn't return with her. He must be provided for somewhere else. Then we saw the doctor and Morton the minister. Morton was somewhat prejudiced, owing to Van's raffle, but he's a pretty decent fellow and seemed to think what he called a good action on my part might offset even a bedquilt gamble. So between us we fixed it up.

"Old Sparrow is offered a job as general shoveler and brick carrier over there at the hotel. They're building a new addition, you know. Brown, the manager, said he'd take him on, as a favor to me. He has been offered the place. If he doesn't accept, why, out he goes. Scudder has told him he can't stay in his house any longer. You should have seen him when we broke the news last night."

"S'pose he don't accept," I asks. "What about the children?"

"They'll be looked out for. Lycurgus will board at Scudder's. Eureka will stay with us. Editha and the baby will be roomed and fed by the minister. The others are to have good boarding places and go to school. Every one is willing to help the family, but they won't keep the old rascal. It has worked out beautifully."

"Hold on a minute," says I. "It's all right, as a clam. But Eureka won't let her dad suffer even though she knows there ain't nothing really the matter with him. And who's going to pay all the young ones' board? She can't."

"I'll attend to that," says he, impatient. "It isn't enough to signify. And it will be all settled before Eureka knows it. The old man will take the job."

"I'll bet a cooky he don't," I says. "But it'll make him scratch gravel one way or 'nother. Bully for you, Mr. Hartley! I'm glad I'm along to see the fun."

"The fun was last night," says he. "Caesar! how he did cough and groan. And then swear! But here's the rest of the crowd."

They were waiting for us on the corner. Dr. Penrose was there, and Mr. Morton, and Cap'n Benijah Poundberry, chairman of selectmen, and Scudder, and Peter T. Brown, manager of the Old Home house. They was all laughing, and thinking the whole thing a big joke.

"Mr. Hartley," says the doctor, "I wish you were to be a permanent resident. There are a few more more cases of this kind I'd like to have you tackle."

We walked on together the rest of the way, laughing and talking. Nobody took the business serious at all. They all thought Washy would go to work when he found 'twas either that or get out and hustle for a place to put his head in.

We marched into the Sparrow yard like a Fourth of July parade. Hartley knocked at the kitchen door. Editha opened it.

"Is your father in?" asked the Twin.

"Yes, sir," says Editha. "He's in. I s'pose you'd like to see him, wouldn't you? Pa, here's Mr. Hartley."

There was a groan from the dining room. Then some coughs, like a string of small earthquakes. Finally a dreadful weak voice orders us to step right in. The rest of the crowd went on ahead. I stopped for a jiffy to speak to Editha.

"Where's the rest of the children?" I asks.

THE REAL TROUBLE.

"Some mis-bul sinner took an' runned off wid de collection hat las' meetin' day," said Brother Dickey, "an' I well knows dat of dar wuz no sich place as hell, de good Lawd would make one fer dat sinner!"

"Was there much money in the hat?"

"No, suh; day warn't so much ez a brass button in it."

"Then why are you so mad about it?"

"Hit wuz my hat," he said.—Atlanta Constitution.

SENSE OF HUMOR.

"Should a public man have a sense of humor?"

"Yes," answered Senator Sorghum.

"But the people want serious men."

"That's the point. You must have a sense of humor in order to recognize anything that might prove diverting and avoid saying it."

SHERLOCK HOLMES.

We passed, in the course of an hour, two dead cows and more than 50 dead chickens. A strong smell of gasoline pervaded the atmosphere and there were wheel tracks in the dust.

Sherlock Holmes became greatly interested.

"Watson," exclaimed he, after deep thought, "there's been an automobile along here!"—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Music Club

The Music Club met Monday afternoon with Mrs. F. Buckley. The composer studied was Mrs. H. H. A. Beach.

The following program was rendered:

Musical News.

Piano Solo, "La Gavelle," Wallenhaupt, Mrs. H. C. Kepner.

Piano Solo, "Forget Me Not," H. Engelmann, Mrs. J. J. Peck.

Piano Solo, "Il Penseroso," F. Heller.

Vocal Duet, "In the Sweet Dim Light," Mrs. Kines and Miss Carnes.

Piano Solo, "Flora," Wenzel, Mrs. J. T. Wilkerson.

Piano Solo, "Spring Whispers," R. H. L. Watson, Mrs. W. Draper.

Piano Solo, "Cathedral Chimes at Christmas Eve," H. Engelmann, Mrs. F. P. Sizer.

The club wil meet during January with Mrs. J. T. Wilkerson.

The ladies present not mentioned on the program were Mesdames F. R. Miller, G. B. White and F. Buckley.

At the Waldensian Church.

Mr. Cassidy, Secretary of the Worlds Evangelization, of the Y. M. C. A., will speak at the new Waldensian Church Friday evening

A weeks meetings will be held, beginning Sunday. There will be services each afternoon and evening. On Monday and Tuesday Dr, Shepherd of Webb City, will address the people

The new church has been open for meetings since Christmas and will accomodate a large audience

Water Works Office

The new Water Works office will be open New Year's day in the Peirce building on Broadway east of the Attaway hotel. Supt. C. J. Landerdale has secured the services of Miss Mollie Lyons as secretary.

Alien Growth is Small.

Washington, Dec. 22.—The increase in the alien population of the United States in the year ending September 30 last was only 6,928. Secretary of Commerce and Labor Straus today called the attention of Hresident Roosevelt to these figures.

According to Secretary Straus, 724,112 foreigners came into this country between October 1, 1907, and September 30, last, but during the same period 717,814 left our shores for their own countries. Some of these, however, were naturalized Americans going abroad to live, but the exact number of these were not obtained

Secretary Straus said that never before has the Government had figures as to departing aliens.

Judge Thurman, before whom the case against William Baker of Aurora charged with selling intoxicating liquors at the Elks lodge o that place, was tried here the 7th inst., gave his decision last week in which he held that the law conferred no rights upon a lodge to dispense intoxicants in local option territory under any circumstances, nor in wet territory without a dram shop license. No appeal will be taken. This seems to have been the first case of the kind in the state and since the decision of Judge Thurman has been published it is reported that information will be filed against lodges at Springfield and other places in the state.—Mt. Vernon Chieftain.